



Army Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Program

CREL Management Office (LRECMO)
14 December 2015

THE SITUATION IN SYRIA: IS THE NEXT MAJOR CONFLICT IMMINENT?

1:00-3:00 pm (CST) Monday, Dec. 14 in the Arnold Conference Room

Dr. Robert Baumann, Director, CGSC MMAS; Mr. Gustav Otto, CGSC Defense Intelligence Chair, Defense Intelligence Agency; Mr. Gary Hobin, Department of Joint, Interagency and Multinational Operations (DJIMO); and Dr. Mahir Ibrahimov, Program Manager, Language, Regional Expertise and Culture Management Office (LRECMO) will lead the discussion.

For more information contact the CAC LRECMO Program Manager at 913-684-3345.

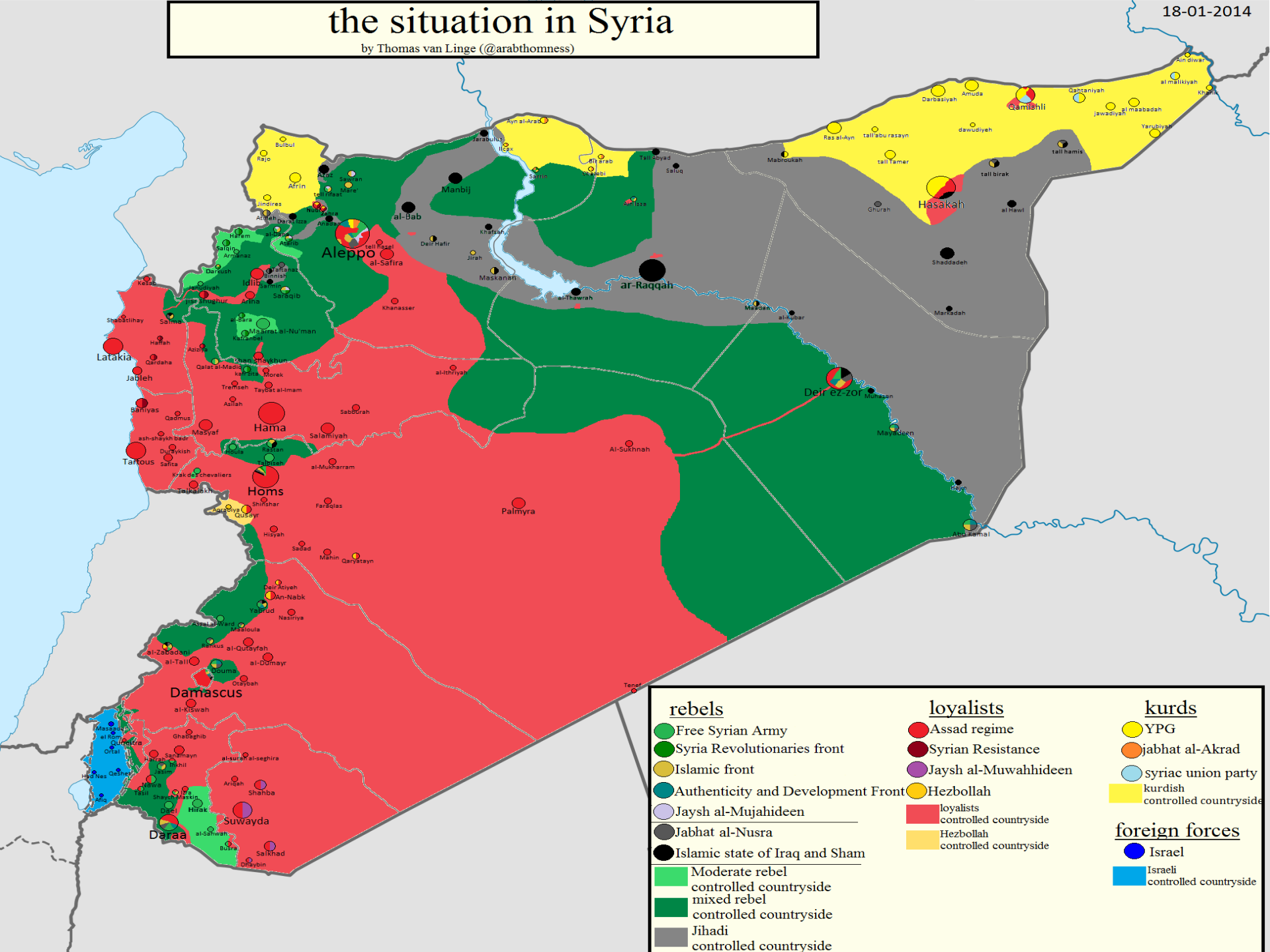
The event is sponsored by the CAC Culture and Language Management Office in collaboration with CGSC and is open to all interested persons (CoEs/schools will be linked through VTC.)



the situation in Syria

by Thomas van Linge (@arabthomness)

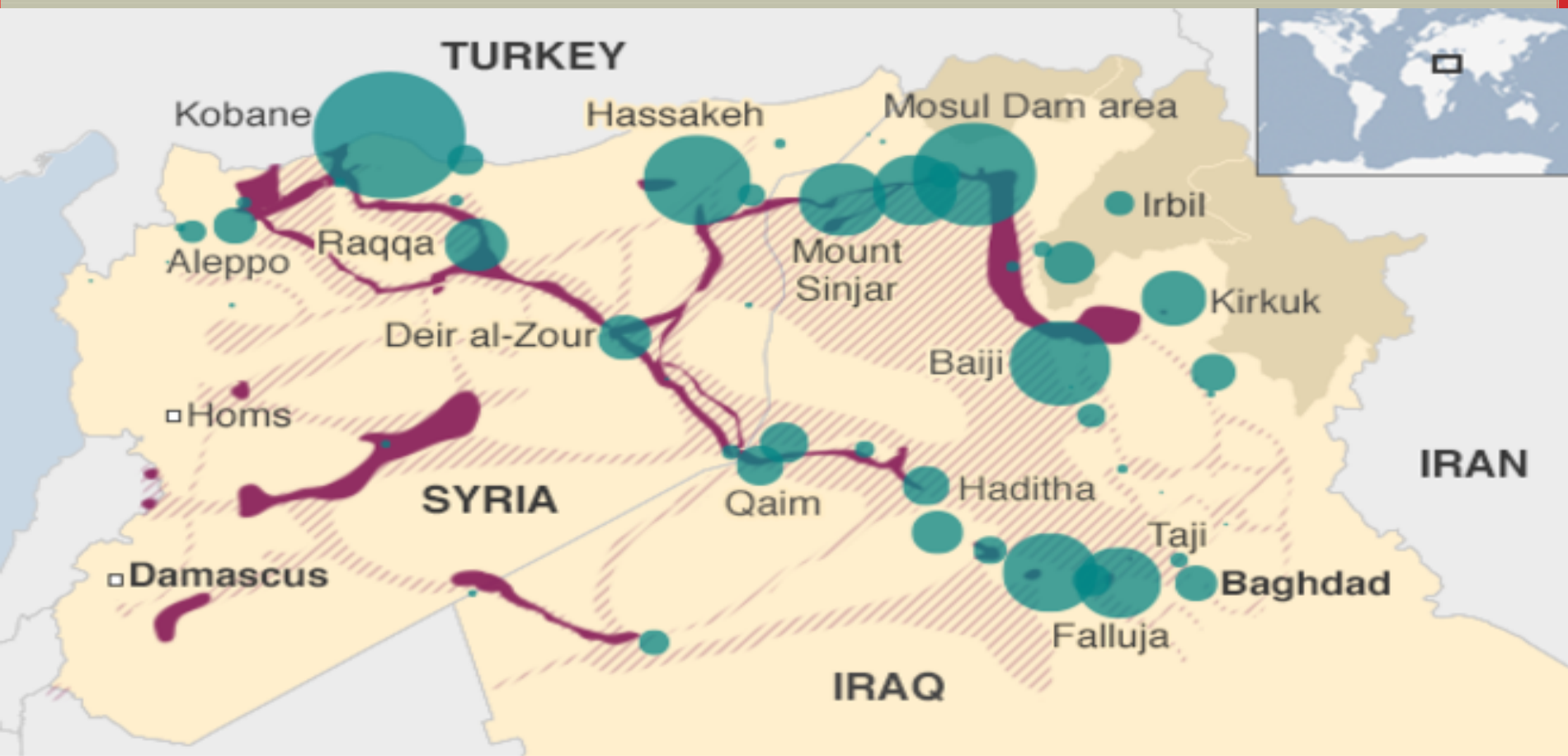
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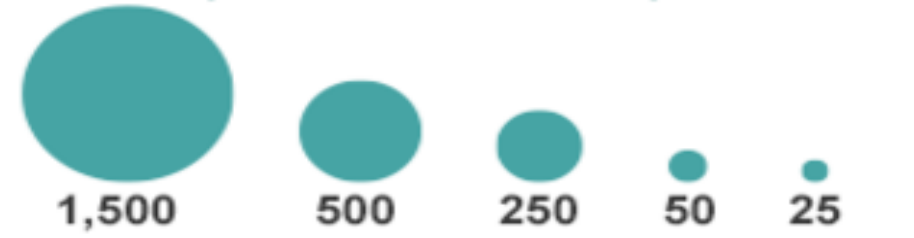
SITUATION IN SYRIA: MILITARY PRESENCE OF MAJOR PLAYERS



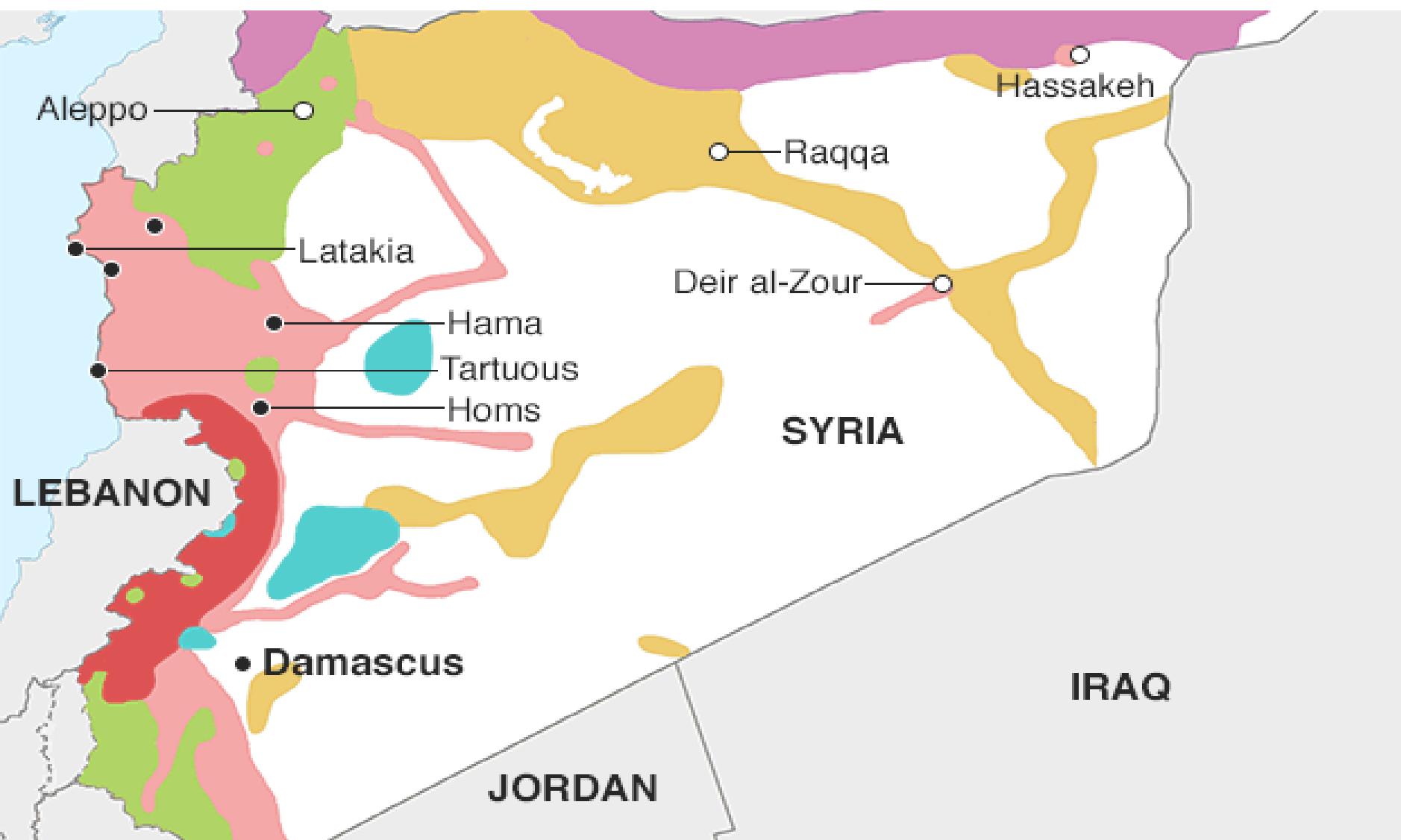
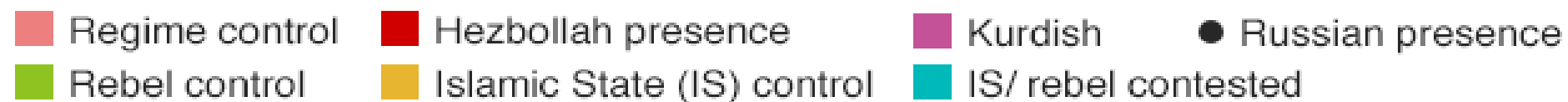
US-LED COALITION AIR STRIKES IN SYRIA AND IRAQ



Confirmed air strikes up to 30 Sep 2015
IRAQ 4,365 **SYRIA 2,410**



SITUATION IN SYRIA: GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PLAYERS



SITUATION IN SYRIA: GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PLAYERS(CON-ED)

United States:

- **President Assad cannot be part of Syria's future.**
- **Accused President Assad of responsibility for widespread atrocities and says he must go.**
- **Agrees on the need for a negotiated settlement to end the war and the formation of a transitional administration.**
- **Supports Syria's main opposition alliance, the National Coalition, and provides limited military assistance to "moderate" rebels.**
- **Since September 2014, has been conducting air strikes on IS and other jihadist groups in Syria as part of an international coalition.**
- **A program to train and arm 5,000 Syrian rebels to take the fight to IS on the ground has suffered setbacks, with few having even reached the frontline.**

SITUATION IN SYRIA: GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PLAYERS (CON-ED)

Russia:

- **Has been one of Syria's staunchest allies for decades.**
- **Is one of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's most important international backers.**
- **It has blocked resolutions critical of President Assad at the UN Security Council.**
- **Has continued to supply weapons to the Syrian military despite international criticism.**
- **Tartus serves as Russia's sole Mediterranean base for its Black Sea fleet, has forces at air base in Latakia, President Assad's Shia Alawite heartland.**
- **Began launching air strikes against rebels In September 2015 against the “Islamic State (IS)” and "all terrorists".**
- **Per Western sources, Western-backed groups were reported to have been hit.**
- **President Vladimir Putin said that only a political solution can end the conflict.**

SITUATION IN SYRIA: GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PLAYERS (CON-ED)

Saudi Arabia:

- **Provides military and financial assistance to several rebel groups in Syria, including those with Islamic ideologies.**
- **Says President Assad must hand over power to a transitional administration or be removed by force.**
- **Has called for a no-fly zone to be imposed to protect civilians from bombardment by Syrian government forces.**
- **Takes part in the US-led coalition air campaign against IS, concerned by the group's advances and its popularity among a minority of Saudis.**

Turkey:

- **Has led calls for Assad to step down since the start of the Syrian uprising.**
- **Has been a staunch critic of Mr. Assad since the start of the uprising in Syria.**
- **A key supporter of the Syrian opposition and has faced the burden of hosting almost two million refugees.**
- **But rebel fighters, arms shipments and refugees passed through its territory has been exploited by foreign jihadists joining IS.**
- **After an IS bomb attack in July 2015 agreed to let the US-led coalition against IS to use its air bases for strikes on Syria.**

Iran:

- **Has helped Syrian forces against the rebels.**
- **Spending billions of dollars a year to prop up President Assad and his Alawite-dominated government: military advisers, weapons, oil transfers.**
- **Syria is the main transit point for Iranian weapons shipments to the Lebanese Shia Islamist movement, Hezbollah.**
- **Has been influential in Hezbollah's decision to send fighters to western Syria to assist pro-Assad forces.**
- **Militiamen from Iran and Iraq are also fighting alongside Syrian troops protecting Shia holy sites.**
- **Has proposed a peaceful transition in Syria that would culminate in free, multi-party elections.**
- **Was involved in peace talks over Syria's future for the first time when world powers has recently met in Vienna.**

SITUATION IN SYRIA: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- **Syrian Arab Republic - part of “Greater Syria.”**
- **Post World War I - dissolution of Ottoman Empire.**
 - Syria granted to France as a “mandate.”
 - Lebanon established as a separate state.
- **Post World War II - independence.**
 - Chaotic politics - “revolving door” governments.
 - Alawite minority favored by French - power base.
- **Al-Assad family.**
 - Hafez al-Assad. Air Force commander; seized power 1971. Brought stability by “busting heads.” Family rule. Died 2000.
 - Bashar al-Assad. Not intended to succeed; death of older brother changed plan. Maneuvered to secure his rule.
- **“Arab Spring” - hope for liberalization dashed.**
 - Student demonstrations put down forcibly.
 - Beginning of civil war in Syria; multiple adversarial groups.
- **Chaos in eastern Syria, along the Euphrates river line.**
 - “Ungoverned spaces” provided sanctuary for Islamic State insurgents.

Discussion:

- **Do Global and Regional Players (we have addressed) agree that conflict will only end when parties find a political solution?**
- **What feasible alternatives for Bashar al-Assad's political future might be part of that solution?**

SOME READING SOURCES:

Congressional Research Service: “Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response,” (Prepared for members and committees of Congress,) October 9, 2015.

Edward Luttwak, ‘Georgia conflict: Moscow has blown away soft power’, *The Daily Telegraph*, August 16, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews>

Gabriela Baczynska, Tom Perry, Laila Bassam and Phil Stewart: “Russian troops join combat in Syria – sources,” Reuters, Sep 10, 2015.

G. Friedman, “From Estonia to Azerbaijan: American Strategy After Ukraine,” Stratfor, 25 March, 2014.

M. Ibrahimov, “Western Stimuli and the Rise of Militant Islam.” Fires Bulletin, July/August 2011.

M. Ibrahimov, Book: “Life Looking Death in the EYE: The Iraqi War as Experienced by a U. Army Contactor.” Global Scholarly Publication New York, NY, USA. ISBN: 978-1-59267-1304. February 2012.





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